Cell Phone Use and Gaming Addictions

Author Note

Clint A. Wilson, Huntington University

Introduction to Addictions (SWX236-(EX16)-X1, SP-2017-UNDG)

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Clint Wilson,

Contact: clint@clintawilson.com

Cell Phone Use and Gaming Addictions

Cell phone addiction is my constant need to be looking at my phone and moreover to playing games on my phone. Recently I learned of a phobia that I may also have as relates to my cell phone addiction and that is nomophobia, which is the fear of losing my phone or losing service on my phone. As I navigate through the day, I find myself always reaching in my pocket to ensure my phone is there, constantly checking battery life, so I know the precise moment to hook it to my external battery. This is an addiction plain and straightforward. The first intent of this project was to track and identify my use of gaming on my phone, but discovered unknowingly it reached much deeper than gaming. I found myself constantly checking Facebook, looking at the latest pins on Pinterest, Instagram, insert social media platform here. I have all the social media apps, and use them all. It is any wonder I have time to live my life.

In an article regarding cell phone addiction states, “addictive cell phone use may meet several criteria for dependence, including excessive use, problems with parents associated with excessive use, interference with school and other personal activities, gradual increase in use to obtain the same previous level of gratification, and the need to avoid emotional alterations when cell phone use is impeded” (Sansone & Sansone, 2013). I believe it is important to add that the article went on to include the potential psychosocial risks from this addiction. “However, like any other phenomenon, there appear to be some potential psychosocial risks with cell phones. These risks include the personal stress of responding to and maintaining unrestricted and immediate contact with others; possible sleep disturbances related to the anticipation of use after lights out, feeling keyed up after cell-phone conversations, and/or biologically mediated changes in sleep structure related to the electromagnetic fields generated by cell phones; the facilitation of cyberbullying; and overuse/misuse” (Sansone & Sansone, 2013).

In searching for a proven and effective treatment plan to remedy this addiction, I became discouraged as I was coming up empty. Ironically, enough I found several articles on using a cell phone to help other addictions. An article that I found in Psychology Today gives some suggestions on conquering the addiction of cell phone use. Their ideas include not checking our phone first thing in the morning, something I am guilty of every day. Making the old phrase “out of sight, out of mind” the mantra and to live by it. Just as in other addictions enlisting help from others in the form of accountability partners. Placing phone on the charger or off well before bedtime. Uninstalling useless apps that just waste time. Uninstall all the time-consuming apps like social media or in my case Clash of Clans and Clash Royale. Parental controls on our self may remind us about our addiction. Finally, the one I find somewhat hard is reminding ourselves that the phone is just a device, not an appendage. (Wasmer Andrews, 2017)

In tracking my frequency, the numbers did surprise me marginally. I expected higher numbers, and almost question the validity of my own data. Were there times I had thoughts and failed to log it? I do not know, but consistently, one thing I saw was anytime I was alone or feeling lonely I was on my phone. While keeping busy with activities, work, or family, I had almost no thoughts about my phone.

A study was done on the internet, and cell phone usage found some results that support my idea of primarily using my phone in times of loneliness. One of the quotes from this article states “Other studies find that feelings of loneliness and lack of social support may lead students to become addicted to the Internet” (Jenaro, Flores, Gómez-Vela, González-Gil, & Caballo, 2007). The peer-reviewed article dealt with both cell phone and internet usage, so I feel it is very much relevant.

Some of the methods I used to help myself resolve this issue, include keeping busy, leaving phone somewhere else, the use of my smart watch to track messages and to have the input of my spouse.

Keeping busy seemed to be the primary deterrent to cell phone use as already discussed, but the other methods helped in some areas and caused other problems in one area. Leaving my phone at the house caused anxiety and panic issues within me. I kept wondering what important email am I missing, what if one of my kids needs me, is my castle being attacked. This method would be the almost the same as taking someone thoroughly addicted to meth and taking it away from them all at once; it leads to withdrawal. Though meth would be as much physical as psychological the loss of cell phone is purely psychological. Enlisting the help of my spouse didn’t work too much in the long run. Early on it was effective, but as time went on it was annoying and caused a small argument. The feeling of being controlled by another person was extremely problematic for me.

The surprising method that worked well was the use of my smart watch to receive messages and alerts. Yes, I was still getting my information, but I was able to say this doesn’t require my attention or it does require my attention right now. I was looking at my phone a lot less frequently, which in turn led to less rabbit chasing as I would frequently do. I mean I am already here playing one game, might as well play the other one, well let’s check social media, hmm wonder what deals are on Amazon today. It never ends until something else would grab my attention.

As mentioned earlier trying to find an adequate proven recovery process for cell phone addiction is difficult. Cell phone addiction at this point has not even been listed in the DSM-5. I have come to realize that this addiction does interfere significantly with my social life surrounding my family. There was once a time I would prefer playing a board game over anything else, now board games cut into my phone use time. I am also starting to see same traits and qualities with my 11-year-old daughter. As I navigate through the recovery process, using a harm reduction process, I can foresee many changes on myself over this period. The psychological problems and help that I feel I may face are anxiety and panic early on, but once I no longer feel the need to be on my phone constantly, I feel I will have some calmness.

I truthfully do not know what impact recovery would have on my social, biological, and spiritual being. I would like to think that my social being will be more Intune with the people around me and that I will find joy again in a simple game of sorry or trouble. Biologically, maybe my anxiety when playing games will cease, and I will have better control over my racing heart and my breathing. Spiritual, I like to think I can find some peace and use the time that otherwise was spent wasted on frivolous cell phone activity can be utilized for prayer life or study.

The fact of the matter as is pointed out by Conyers is “Personal growth is a lifelong process with ups and downs. Recovery, a form of personal growth, takes a long time” (Conyers, 2009, P. 21). I think back to the reality of how long this addiction has been with me, and I realize I obtained my first PDA (before smart phones) back in 2001. Then somewhere around 2005 my first smartphone, then there was my first of what now is my sixth or seventh iPhone began on June 29, 2007. The primary game I play, Clash of Clans, which was released in 2012 has been a staple ever since. Not only has the time involved plagued me, but the dollar amount of upgrades here and there is countless. So I can see reducing my phone time to be very beneficial to all aspects of my life.

The future of this addiction, I am not sure. In doing research for this paper, I did come across and an app called moment that tracks actual screen time and how many times the phone is picked up. Yesterday the first time using the app which was a slow long, dull day, I found that I had eight hours and six minutes of screen time with sixty-one pickups. The time spent began to put more things into real perspective to me when I am using 1/3rd of my entire day staring at the display of my phone. The application also has features to help reduce usage of my phone which I may utilize. My plan is not abstinence but harm reduction, I want to limit my game time to certain periods of the day for the certain amount of times. Our text gives some harm reduction tactics that I will be employing. “Set a kitchen timer and force yourself to log off when it rings…” (Wormer & Davis, 2012, P 296). I can also look for parental control apps and give the power up to my spouse. Naturally, my work email has to be available all the time, but I am going to try to put the phone fully away and not use it as much as possible this next week as I enjoy a vacation in Michigan.

I have been thinking about the Christian implications of such a device. I took steps a while ago to help with this aspect. At one time my phone was my only source of reading the word. I went as far as installing WiFi in our church so I would have adequate coverage. I now do leave my phone in my vehicle while at church and resort back to my old tattered and beaten Bible that I do cherish. I continue to think mainly about the usage numbers shared earlier and wonder to myself am I guilty of idol worship? Has my phone become the modern day equivalent of Bael? Have I begun to carry a new God who gets more of my attention in my pocket? What does this look like to the outsiders looking in at a pastor who has his eyes fixated on a mind-numbing bright screen?

Social media an often unfiltered opinion driven form of gossip. The Bible is obvious on gossip and hurtful words which are cyber bullying. “Repeat these basic essentials over and over to God’s people. Warn them before God against pious nitpicking, which chips away at the faith. It just wears everyone out. Concentrate on doing your best for God, work you won’t be ashamed of, laying out the truth plain and simple. Stay clear of pious talk that is only talking. Words are not mere words, you know. If they’re not backed by a godly life, they accumulate as poison in the soul. Hymenaeus and Philetus are examples, throwing believers off stride and missing the truth by a mile by saying the resurrection is over and done with” (2 Timothy 2:14-18, The Message).

It is easy to fall into the trap of social media where we all too common air out our dirty laundry for the world to see. Where our unfiltered thoughts spew forth belittling people around us, or maybe we are on the receiving end of this. Where the words on the screen become so much that we withdraw from society maybe even blaming God for allowing it to happen. The worse situation is when the words become so overpowering that a person takes their life.

So as with any addiction, our faith and our living example of Christianity can be tested, and we may fail that test.

In summary, I suffer stronger than I once wanted to admit to a cell phone addiction to the point of a phobia. The implications as a Christian can be great when I get drawn into the gossip and cyberbullying in social media. So far neither of those have happened but doesn’t take much one slip, and it is all gone. I plan to use a harm reduction strategy to slow down my use of my cell phone.

References

Conyers, B. (2009). *Everything changes: help for families of newly recovering addicts* (First). Center City: Hazelden Publishing.

*Holy Bible: The message.*(2016).Costa Mesa, CA: Saddleback Educational Publishing.

Jenaro, C., Flores, N., Gómez-Vela, M., González-Gil, F., & Caballo, C. (2007). Problematic internet and cell-phone use: Psychological, behavioral, and health correlates. *Addiction Research & Theory*, *15*(3), 309–320. https://doi.org/10.1080/16066350701350247

Sansone, R. A., & Sansone, L. A. (2013). Cell phone: The psychosocial risks. *Innovations in Clinical Neuroscience*, *10*(1), 33–37.

Wasmer Andrews, L. (2017). 7 Tips to Get Smartphone Overuse Under Control. *Psychology Today*. Retrieved from https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/minding-the-body/201606/7-tips-get-smartphone-overuse-under-control

Wormer, K. van, & Davis, D. R. (2012). *Addiction Treatment: A Strengths Perspective* (3rd ed.). Brooks Cole.